

REMARKS

The rejections of claims 8 and 9 under 35 USC §102(b)(e) have been obviated by revising claim 8 to more clearly distinguish the invention from the prior art of record.

As is indicated in the “Background...” section of the specification, the principal purpose of the invention is to obviate the need for a cutting operation for flash created around the periphery of a molded steering wheel. The applicants have observed that the unwanted flash occurs as a result of the coating agent which is applied to the inside of the steering wheel mold incident to the manufacture of the wheel. The purpose of the coating agent is to improve weather-resistance of the surface of the resin molding portions of the steering wheel. This coating agent is applied to the interior surface of the mold cavity by means of a spray gun or the like.

Incident to the spray gun operation, some of the coating agent is applied not only to the cavity, but also to parting surfaces of the steering wheel mold. The applicants have observed that it is the coating agent that is inadvertently applied to the parting surfaces of the steering wheel mold that results in the unwanted flash that is created around the outer periphery of the molded steering wheel. As this flash must be cut off in a separate manufacturing step in order to complete the fabrication of the steering wheel, it increases the amount of the effort and cost associated with manufacture.

Claim 8 has been revised to more specifically recite the functional aspects of the invention which result in the advantages of the invention. Amended claim 8 now recites a mask for covering parting surfaces “of steering wheel molding members”, the mask being mountable to coated-portion steering wheel molding members corresponding to portions of a molded steering wheel surface on which a coating is formed, the mask having a shape that corresponds “to the surface shape of the coated-portion steering wheel molding member,” wherein the mask

“has a peripheral portion that covers parting surfaces of the coated-portion steering wheel molding member in the state in which the mask is mounted to coated-portion molding member to prevent the formation of flash around a periphery of a molded steering wheel from said coating.”

None of the references of record either discloses or suggests the mask defined in amended claim 8. The McClinton '568 patent discloses only a method of preparing a patterned mold surface used to bond a resin coating to a masonry unit. Accordingly, all this reference is concerned with is a mask for masking-off selected portions of the mold surface of a mold member during a sand blasting operation in order to selectively texture the mold surface. As this reference is not in the least concerned with a mask for covering parting surfaces of a steering wheel mold, and further is not concerned with such a mask for preventing the formation of flash around the periphery of a molded steering wheel from a coating applied to the parting surfaces of a steering wheel molding member, amended claim 8 is clearly patentable over the McClinton '568 patent.

The Zimmerman '012 patent is likewise irrelevant to the invention defined in amended claim 8. All this reference discloses is a mask for protecting the sheer edge of a mold that comprises an air flow duct having an opening located adjacent to the mold edge. Hence, there is no disclosure or suggestion of the recited mask for covering parting surfaces of steering wheel molding members having the recited "peripheral portion that covers parting surfaces of the coated-portion steering wheel molding member... to prevent the formation of flash around a periphery of a molded steering wheel from said coating." For all these reasons, amended claim 8 is clearly patentable over Zimmerman '012 patent.

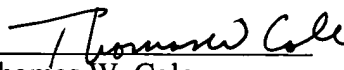
Finally, amended claim 8 is patentable over the Gobled '000 patent. All this reference is concerned with is a method a making a piece of plastic that is selectively painted. To this end, this patent discloses a method wherein "a peel-off" film is deposited inside a mold in order to define the shape of the molded piece. After the piece has been molded, the film may be easily separated from the support to which it is fixed in order to uncover a non-painted portion of the molded piece. Nowhere is there any disclosure or suggestion whatever of the recited mask for covering parting surfaces having "a peripheral portion that covers parting surfaces of the coated-portion steering wheel molding member...to prevent the formation of flash around a peripheral of a molded steering wheel from said coating." Accordingly, amended claim 8 is patentable over the Gobled '000 patent as well as the previously mentioned '012 and '568 patents.

The balance of the claims are patentable at least by reason of their ultimate dependency upon amended claim 8. In particular, as the Examiner has previously indicated that claim 10 recites allowable subject matter, no detailed discussion of claims 10, 11 and 12 is deemed necessary since these claims are even more clearly allowable as a result of the addition of the aforementioned limitations to independent claim 8.

Finally, new claim 17 includes all the limitations for allowable claim 10 re-written into independent form. Accordingly, this claim is allowable.

Now that all the claims are believed to be allowable, the prompt issuance of a Notice of Allowance and Issue Fee Due is hereby earnestly solicited.

Respectfully submitted,


Thomas W. Cole
Registration No. 28,290

NIXON PEABODY LLP
Suite 900
401 9th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20004-2128
Telephone: (202) 585-8000
Fax: (202) 585-8080